

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

WILLIAMS LAKE PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 19 JUNE 2004
AT THE OVERLANDER HOTEL
CONVENTION CENTRE

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

Victor M. Young

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The tyranny of the majority.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Young expressed the opinion that the divide between the urban and rural communities has become the greatest cleavage in Canada. The presenter argued that the more indispensable the rural areas become, the less their voice counts in the urban centres. Mr. Young discussed the elimination of the federal riding of the Cariboo, and the continually expanding geographic size of rural ridings as compared to the small size of urban constituencies. The presenter questioned whether this constituted equal representation. Mr. Young argued that this distribution of boundaries was not applied equally across Canada as reflected in the federal representation of Prince Edward Island and Quebec. The presenter questioned why these standards should be applied in BC when they are not applied equally across Canada. Mr. Young argued that the sparsely populated areas of the province should be accorded a measure of flexibility in the design of local ridings, particularly as they are responsible for the production of the vast majority of the province's resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Young argued against the introduction of PR on the grounds that it will transfer power to the densely populated lower mainland. The presenter stated that even a partial system of PR will inevitably diminish the number of rural representatives. While Mr. Young acknowledged that no electoral system would please everyone, he questioned why this process of reform was sparked by the Liberal's exaggerated majority rather than the NDP victory with fewer votes than the Liberals in 1996 in which "the will of the majority was thwarted". Mr. Young argued that BC's population is heterogeneous, and will not, therefore, benefit from a system of PR as urbanites are isolated from the rest of BC, and pay little attention to the resources provided by the rural areas. The presenter argued that urban people located in the lower mainland may restrict resource development on the grounds of environmental arguments that are ill-informed. Finally, Mr. Young stated that the apathy of the youth should not be catered for by altering the electoral system.

Quote: The recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly should not result in any further disenfranchisement of rural people.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Can you be more specific regarding the inequality between urban and rural ridings?

A I think that we should look more closely at how the ridings are put together. When you travel these ridings they are so large that one person would have a hell of a job looking after many of them. We shouldn't allow provincial ridings to be put together only on the basis of population rather than on the grounds of access to the MLA. I am very aware of all the misunderstandings of our natural environments that exist in Vancouver. Perhaps introducing the STV would modify things a little, but I wonder if there is any system of PR that you could devise that would not disenfranchise the rural ridings.

Q To achieve better rural representation, would you like to increase the size of the Legislative Assembly, or would you like to take members away from the lower mainland?

A The lower mainland may have to give up a few members. I don't think that you would have to increase the number of seats in the legislature.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q Do you think it would be more beneficial to increase or decrease the number of ridings in the province?

A Obviously more ridings would help most situations but there has to be a limit. With 75 members I think that you could rearrange the current boundaries to handle it.